

## Open and Closed Doors

### *Revelation 3:7-13*

#### I. The “theology” of strength and weakness.

##### A. In God’s economy:

1. The “strongest” churches are the “weakest” churches.
2. The “Weakest” churches are the “strongest” churches.

##### B. Biblical support:

1. 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Corinthians 11:30; 2 Corinthians 12:10

##### C. Biblical weakness:

1. A humility of mind—weakness in ego, a brokenness of heart, a poverty of spirit, to be emptied of self, to be meek.
2. Human strength can take one’s eyes off their need for Jesus and think “I did this!”

#### II. The church in Philadelphia.

##### A. Philadelphia, a young city, founded 189 BC, 25 miles southeast of Sardis, because of the highway system, a major travel hub—supporting a missionary church.

##### B. Philadelphia – *Phileo*= love, *adelphos*= Brother—“Love of brother”

1. Ruler Attalus II was loyal to his brother Eumenes II= “Philadelphia”.

#### III. The letter.

##### A. Jesus identifies Himself as:

1. Holy and true—Only God is holy and true.
2. He holds “the key of David”.
  - a. Isaiah 22:22
  - b. The “keys to the kingdom”.

##### B. “I know your deeds”

1. “I have given before you an open door which no one can shut”.
  - a. Salvation? Coincides with the “key of David” in verse 7.

- b. Mission opportunities: God opens doors to advance the gospel.
  - 1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:2; Acts 14:27

2. Reasons for Philadelphia's "open doors".

- a. They had "little power"—in humility they relied on the power of Jesus Christ.
- b. Kept "My word".
- c. Did not "deny My name".

C. God's protection.

- 1. Jesus will honor us in the eyes of those hostile toward us.
- 2. Jesus will keep us from the hour of tribulation that comes upon the entire world—Differing views:
  - a. Refers to the time of the historical church at Philadelphia—does not apply to a coming period of worldwide tribulation.
  - b. Jesus is foretelling a seven-year (future) period of worldwide tribulation per Daniel 9—Daniel's "70<sup>th</sup> week" and in Jeremiah 30:7 "Jacob's trouble".
  - c. If one embraces #2, how it is understood will determine which camp:
    - Pretribulation: The church will be removed (raptured) prior to the tribulation.
    - Post-tribulation: The church will go through the tribulation but protected by God.

D. (11) The crown.

- 1. Protect yourself.
  - a. Don't get sidetracked, rely on His strength, keep the God's word close, honoring Jesus's name.
- 2. "So that no one will take your crown" – your reward in heaven.
- 3. You will be a pillar in the sanctuary of God—Revelation 21:22.
  - a. the position of absolute security.

## Open and Closed Doors

### *Revelation 3:7-13*

Have you ever thought about the “theology” of strength and weakness?

There something interesting about these seven churches we’ve been looking at these past weeks...[ after today’s church... the church in Philadelphia... we have one more to go...the church in Laodicea...] you might have noticed... that two of the churches do not get a condemnation like the other five...

These two churches...the church in Smyrna and today’s church in Philadelphia were both *commended* by Jesus Christ as being churches holding fast to God in the name of Jesus... they were faithful, spiritually alive, vital churches.... No complaints from Jesus....

These two churches we see had something else in common...they were very humble churches... they were both seemingly insignificant... from the outside looked small... possibly struggling...building probably needed a paint job... where the other five churches looked very good...

Compare these two humble churches to the two other churches that get absolutely NOTHING of a commendation... the church in Sardis (two weeks ago) and next week’s church in Laodicea... Christ has NOTHING good to say about these two churches... but on the outside... they looked GOOD!....very GOOD!...as we will see next week with Laodicea... VERY VERY VERY GOOD

Remember.... Sardis?...set in the wealthy city of Sardis... they ***had a name that you are alive...amazing reputation...*** When people on the outside heard the name “Sardis Church”...they thought “*That’s the church to go to*”...People from all over were saying what a *thriving great church!... so alive... so vital...* yet what did Jesus say of this church?... **but you are dead!...**living in their past accomplishments...

We’ll see that the church at Laodicea was the church that *had it all*... the best money could buy... a wealthy church...you drive by that church and the buildings were stunning...the parking lot full of cars...Mercedes and Lamborghinis... the place to be... state of the art technology... a small coffee café with a line to get their Sunday morning Lattes before the service begins.

Yet... what did Jesus say to this church?... ***I know what you do... you are neither hot or cold... I wish that you were one or the other... hot or cold... but you are lukewarm... I will spit you out of My mouth!***

The two churches that have NO POSITIVE QUALITIES MENTION BY JESUS are the two churches that look to be the most impressive...Sardis and Laodicea... while the two churches that have NO NEGATIVE QUALITIES BY JESUS...are the two that appear to be the most weak, insignificant and struggling.... Smyrna and this church in Philadelphia...In God's economy:

**The "strongest" churches are the "weakest" churches...**

**The "Weakest" churches are the "strongest" churches...**

Strength and weakness...

2 Corinthians 12:9

**And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.**

If that is the case... that power is perfected in weakness...Are we to strive to be weak?..(Strive? to be weak?...we don't have to strive to do that!) ...all of us want strength... I pray daily for strength to get through the day... to be strong in order to do my tasks most effectively... we don't want to be weak...

We all like and even strive to be stronger... in better shape...smarter rather than ignorant and dumb... we want to look the best we can... we appreciate beauty over ugly...we don't strive to be uglier... we want good grades... success at our jobs... make a little more money to have a little more house...

Even here at church we want the outside to look presentable, the lawns manicured, the planters weeded and plants cared for to look beautiful...to show we aren't a bunch of sloths!... we don't like the idea of weakness... we strive for strength... and yet... apparently the Bible likes weakness!

- **Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
- **2 Corinthians 11:30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.**
- **"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses...he goes on...I delight in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties." - 2 Corinthians 12:10**

So yes... God's power is perfected in our weakness... but we know that strength and all that goes with it is important for the Christian life...**I buffet my body and make it my slave...** endurance... discipline... determination...we know that working hard is better than sloth... exercising is better than being a couch potato... that studying hard for a test is better than scrolling on the phone for 20 hours.

We tour through the Bible and we see not all are weak... some of the greatest Bible characters exude strength... Abraham was rich... David was wealthy and a king... Moses was mighty in

power... Solomon was wise (and very rich)... Esther was beautiful, Sampson strong... Paul was through the roof in IQ...

So obviously the message we are to take away from these four churches that are opposite ends of strength and weakness is not that **the dumber, uglier, less successful and puny the church is should be the church that we are to strive being.**

So what is the relationship to weakness and us in the Bible?...I think it is clear there is a biblical view of weakness that is better than strength... but how?... In the bible... **the good, positive weakness that we should all desire is a humility of mind**...weakness in ego... a brokenness of heart... a poverty of spirit... to be emptied of self... to be meek... aware of our own short comings... contrite in spirit....knowing we need the strength and power of the Holy Spirit.

Weakness in this way is better than strength... **because to strive for strength without humility and obtaining it...will most likely result in forsaking the Lord and relying on ourselves!**... We are more likely to think *"I did this"* ... *"I am powerful"* ... *"I am almighty"* ....

Jesus said in Matthew 19:23 -**"Truly I say to you, it is *hard* for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."**

Jesus was not condemning riches... He was not saying get rid of your money and put yourself in poverty so you can get to heaven... He was simply saying the danger of wealth is that you might start thinking *I am powerful, I am so smart, I did this, I don't need God, God is for weak people.*

Yet...rich people can be humble in spirit...they can be generous... sacrificial... they actually can be this godly weak person who has a lot of money...and strong.

Hebrews 11...that great chapter of faith, near the end says: **32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I recount Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, as well as David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who **through faith conquered kingdoms** (that's strength!) performed righteousness, obtained promises, **shut the mouths of lions**, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, **were made strong from weakness**, became **mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.****

I went in to all of that because I think the main message Jesus wants us to see in this sixth letter to the church in Philadelphia is that the church He desires is a church that is completely focused NOT on externals...not on positioning themselves in an authoritative position in culture...not in appealing to the outside world by compromising God's word so as not to offend in order to fill seats in the building.

But to be "weak" as in humble... strong in keeping and maintaining God's Word... and exalting the name of Jesus Christ...Lord of Lord name above all names....that's the commendation Jesus

delivers to this humble church in Philadelphia...that's the message this morning...if you heard that and left now...you would have it... but its too early to close....Philadelphia...

Not in Pennsylvania...but in Asia Minor... modern day Turkey...the sixth in a circular line of seven churches in seven cities that make up the mail route....Philadelphia is located 25 miles southeast of Sardis...

Philadelphia is not so ancient as many of the other cities of Asia Minor, for it was founded after 189 BC on one of the highways from Smyrna which led to the interior....in fact... it was the highway system that made Philadelphia important... it was a hub of five major highways that connected all the major cities in Asia...

I think this plays an important factor in the mission of this church....The church at Philadelphia is known as a missionary church....spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the outside world.

Its name was given to it in honor of Attalus II, because of his loyalty to his elder brother, Eumenes II, king of Lydia....Lydia was the empire that ruled much of Asia prior to the Roman rule... from two Greek words.... *Phileo* = love *adelphos* = Brother..... *the city of brotherly love*.

Something else important... there was a large Jewish presence in Philadelphia... it was large enough to have apparently several synagogues...Many if not most of these Jews were very hostile to Christians... making it difficult for the church at Philadelphia.

Like Sardis, Philadelphia was destroyed in a devastating earthquake in 17AD... And also was rebuilt by the Roman emperor Tiberious....it became very loyal to Rome...the city became known as a "missionary city" for promoting Greek and Roman culture...mainly their little "g" gods.

Now imagine... you are a part of this fledgling church in Philadelphia... you are gathered together and the mailman comes and hands the pastor a letter... He opens and begins to read it out loud to the church.... **This is what He who is holy and true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts, no one will open.**

You immediately recognize this is no insignificant letter... you can just see everyone leaning in... **This is what He who is holy and true...**You all know your Bible we're told that in the next verse... so you know there's only one who can rightfully claim to be **Holy and true...**and that is God Himself....only God is "the Holy One"...

Jesus right there makes the claim that He is God...

**Holy**...spotless...pure...The holiness of God is the most difficult of all God's attributes to explain, because it is one of His essential attributes that is not shared, inherently, by man....we can't fully comprehend it...Only God can be fully holy... this is an amazing title.

**True...** completely reliable... He can be completely trusted.... He will never fall short or never disappoint....and then it says...(7) **who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts, no one will open.** (OT important to Rev.)

This is a reference to Isaiah 22:22...a little known prophesy...the prophet tells the palace secretary...a guy named Shebna... that he will be replaced by Eliakim...a type of Jesus Christ... for God **“will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David... When he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open.”**

Key on the shoulder!...A key placed on a shoulder was a big key... couldn't put it in your pocket... they didn't have keyhole locks in those days... a door was locked by placing a large heavy bar across the door... the key would be a large wooden lever to lift the bars off the gates...

So this term came to mean...**The one who holds the keys had the authority**.... the **“key of David”** implies control of David's domain...*the keys to his kingdom*...Jerusalem... the city of David.. which metaphorically was promised to the Messiah...

In Luke 1:32...**He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David**...the keys to the kingdom...Jesus opens this letter with ***I am the holy One—God... I am true, I can be trusted.... I hold the keys to the eternal kingdom....***only I can let you in... nobody else... if I open the door for you... no one else can shut it....complete authority!

You just received a letter from God Himself.... Jesus Christ!...I've never received a letter like that!...

He said to all the other churches... **I know your deeds...** *I know what you have been doing and what you do...* but unlike the other churches excepting the church in Smyrna...*I have no criticism of your deeds... I am pleased with all that I see...* wouldn't that be great to hear from the Master Himself...

## **Read verse 8**

An open door...This could be referring to the salvation Christ brings to the believer... He opens the door to salvation and only He can open the door...Only Jesus can open the door to eternal life in heaven...and no one can shut it...no one is strong enough, mighty enough to close that door once you go through it...when He opens it... it is open...that would connect it with the previous verse...

Jesus...**who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts, no one will open....**keys to the kingdom...

So yes... an open door could be referring to salvation...but I think here...it's even more...an open door means an opportunity to share the gospel... to evangelize... to preach, to teach, to take a job in another town that will open up opportunities for you to share the gospel...

Jesus has opened the door for each one of us who are His... each one who has saving faith in Jesus Christ... true Christians... and now... He opens doors for us to carry out His great mission... to share the gospel to the broken, lost world, make disciples... He opens doors.

We often look for “open doors” in all areas of our lives... *“I’m praying God opens the door for us to move to Hawaii because we like the beach... I hope He opens the door for us to get a bigger house...I pray God opens the door for that new job...”*

Write this down... **God opens doors to advance the gospel!**... so if He opens a door for you to have a bigger house... Maybe that door opened so that you will open your new big house up for a homegroup ministry...

**I have set before you an open door which no one can shut...** here is a challenge we all need to hear...time is short...Jesus is going to return...that’s the message we’ve been told several times already in Revelation...

Ephesus—*If you don’t repent church I am coming to you and remove your lampstand...*

Pergamum—*If you don’t repent I am coming to you quickly and I will make war with the sword of My mouth!*...Judgment

Sardis—*If you don’t wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know what hour I will come to you....* Judgment

Philadelphia—*I am coming quickly hold fast to what you have...*

When we began this series.... I shared a very brief outline of Revelation based on instructions of Jesus to His apostle John in chapter 1:19... **write the things which you have seen..** that was chapter 1... **The things which are...**which are the letters to these seven churches in chapters two and three...which includes all time since up till June 29, 2025... we are living during “**the things which are**”... but things are going to change... and when they do it will all happen quickly.

Beginning in chapter 4... right around the corner... are the things **which will take place after these things...**there is coming great tribulation like the world has never seen before...

I look around the world today and I don’t know how long we have...In my lifetime... I’ve seen tribulation in *many parts* of the world... forty fifty years ago...a war in Viet Nam... some skirmishes in Africa... some riots in the streets of the USA... but now there’s tribulation over the entire world!..(almost could make you a post-tribulationist!).the world is set for His imminent return!



verse 11 **Jesus says He is coming quickly! *Jesus has to come before I finish this sermon!... what's He waiting for!***...He's still opening doors!... "**until the fullness of the Gentiles**" Romans 11:25, the complete number of Gentiles who will believe in Christ must come in before the end of the Church Age...so the doors are still opening...

Once the last responding Gentile is saved, God will fulfill His promises to Israel and send Jesus back for His Bride the church.....until that happens God will continue to "open doors" to bring us to that great day....**I have given you and open door... church...which no one can shut.**

There is a strong biblical precedence for an open door meaning an opportunity made by Jesus Christ to further the gospel...The apostle Paul

1 Corinthians 16:7 - **For I do not wish to see you now just in passing, for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a wide and effective door has opened to me,** *God has opened a door for me to spread the gospel... how do I know?... because it's going so smoothly!...without a hitch?* **and there are many adversaries.** 10 Now if Timothy comes, take care that he is with you without fear, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am.

Colossians 4:2 - **2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak the mystery of Christ,** for which I have also been bound, 4 that I may make it manifest in the way I ought to speak.

Acts 14:27 - **27 And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.** BRING THEM IN!

God was opening doors for the church at Philadelphia... and He is still opening the doors today... what are we waiting for? Is there something more important?... why did God open doors for Philadelphia?

Jesus lists three reasons...

### 1. **You have little power... little power:**

Which implies they were relying on a greater power.... The power of Jesus Christ... **little power** implies:

Very limited in their own strength  
Not a large, thriving in numbers church  
Not wealthy like the church in Thyatira  
Seemingly little influence because they're not flashy  
Little authority  
humble

2. What did they have?... (8) **You have kept My word...(3) and have not denied My name.**

Consistent

Faithful to God's Word...to Jesus Christ

Stayed true to the gospel

Notice what's missing?...no mention of beautiful facilities... 1000 seat capacity... great location... great optics...dynamic speakers... creative programs...good coffee.

*Church at Philadelphia... because you have humbled yourselves... rely on My power for strength...kept My word... have not denied who I am... I am opening doors for you....and no one can shut them.*

As I thought about this, this week... my mind went back to 2006 when we took 22 of us mostly High School students went to Tijuana Mexico to work with an orphanage and build a small house for a family...

We attended a Sunday church service at the orphanage...the church "building" was old plywood shack of a building... nailed together, no glass windows...sheets of used various sized aluminum sheets for the roof... you could see the sky....the floor was half Mexican tile and dirt...

They had a donated electric keyboard for worship music ... a young 12 year old boy knew maybe two praise songs so he played them over and over and over... I remember for maybe an hour? The same songs... the church was full.... People came from all over the impoverished neighborhood along with the orphans....

I think the preacher delivered several sermons... we only stayed for a couple hours.... But they continued for half the day... it spoke volumes to us...little... very little power... faithful to God... proclaiming the gospel... glorifying the name of Jesus Christ...going through the door God opened for them.

I also thought of a little white church on 816 Sycamore St., Clarkston.... Cute but needs paint... (I think we need to go down there for a work day!)...30-40 followers of Christ...who could attend a wide selection of large exciting churches but chose to walk through a door God opened... **little power...clinging to the Word of God... embracing the name of Jesus...** all of them walked through an open door....we are excited to see what God will do in Clarkston through this Philadelphian church!

There was great opposition to this church at Philadelphia... that's what happens when you walk through God's open doors... it is believed that many of the Jewish population oppressed those who professed Jesus Christ as the Messiah....Jesus was very aware of this and very involved...

**God's Protection**

Jesus protects the Philadelphia church and all true churches in two ways...

**1. Jesus will honor us in the eyes of those hostile toward us**

**2. Jesus will keep us from the hour of tribulation that comes upon the entire world.**

**1. Jesus will honor us in the eyes of those hostile toward us**

Even though seemingly insignificant, weak and humble... Jesus promises vindication from those who oppress.... This vindication may not take place in this lifetime.... You might die a martyr...but there will be vindication.

**Read verse 9**

Remember back to 2:9... the church at Smyrna... the other praised church... **‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

Satan is very involved!...These are the Jews that are Jews genetically but not spiritually... There’s a synagogue full of them...*Jesus calls them a synagogue of Satan*... they are religious outwardly but inwardly they are “whitewashed tombs”...hostile to God... hostile to the Messiah Jesus Christ.

Jesus is telling them and us... there will be a day of vindication for all those who persecute you...who reject you... who treat you poorly because of your faith in Jesus Christ.... they will bow down at our feet...they will acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord... Jesus will honor us for our faith in Him and our willingness to walk through His open doors to share the gospel to a hostile world!

[[[A great picture of what Jesus is saying...

Isaiah 43:1(The Redemption of Israel)

**But now, thus says Yahweh, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; **you are Mine!** 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. 3 For I am Yahweh your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. 4 Since you are precious in My sight, Since you are honored and I love you, **I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life.** 5 Do not fear, for I am with you...]]]**

Jesus will honor us in the eyes of those hostile towards us...

**2. Jesus will keep us from the hour of tribulation that comes upon the entire world.**

Now we’re moving into the controversial section of the passage...I’m not going to spend much time on this now because we will be later.

**Read verse 10**

Jesus says to the church... I will keep you from...the hour of tribulation:

1. One view... this is talking about wide-spread difficult times that will take place during the time of this Philadelphia church...and Jesus is promising the church that He will take care of them as they go through it....this would have already taken place 2000 years ago.

But there are no decisive historical records that the “world” went through a massive tribulation period while the church was in existence.

2. Another view is that Jesus is foretelling of the seven year Tribulation as described in Daniel 9...Daniel’s seventieth week... Jeremiah’s “Jacob’s Trouble” in Jeremiah 30:7... that will take place prior to His second coming when He will set up His millennial kingdom.

3. If it is talking about the Great Tribulation... how you read this will determine if you are pretribulation or post tribulation...

-- If you read **I will keep you from the hour of testing** as saying Jesus will *remove* us...the church from the hour of tribulation...raptured... THEN the tribulation for seven years...Pre-Tribulation.

-- Or God will protect you while the tribulation is going on...for seven years... the church will go through it but Jesus will care for the church as it is going on... THEN He will remove the church... raptured.... Post-Tribulation.

The question is... **is it removal or immunity?**... I think the biblical evidence is on the side of Pre-Tribulation which I will flesh out in the future... Pray that I am right!...If I’m not, I will change my mind!....but here’s what you do church:

**Read verse 11**

Don’t get sidetracked...Rely on His strength... keep the God’s word close... honoring Jesus’s name...So you don’t lose your crown... not salvation...that can’t be taken... but your future reward can be... don’t be persuaded by wicked men!

Verse 12 **He who overcomes...**1<sup>st</sup> John 5:5 **Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”...He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God, and he will never go out from it.**

Revelation 21:22 tells us in the New Jerusalem “**the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are in His temple**”...to be a pillar of Christ puts the believer in a position of absolute and complete security.... No disruption...no disturbance...no disaster will ever separate us from our Savior... we will be pillars in His sanctuary!

**Read verse 12...**

My God... four times!....people will think you're weak... insignificant and unimpressive.... But I will tell them you are MINE, MINE, MINE, MINE!...

**Read verse 13**

- Relied on God's strength
- Devoted to God's Word
- Dedicated to the Lord Himself.